

SOVIET AFFAIRS ANALYSIS SERVICE

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Outline of Reference Paper On:

THE SOVIET PEOPLE'S GUARDS, IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE

The Soviet People's Guards, conceived early in 1959 by the Communist Party Central Committee as a means of combating hooliganism, drunkenness and other public disorders, have led to an increase in violations of the law.

The Soviet propagandists claim to see a sharp decline in crime in the USSR, but the opposite seems to be the case. Recently appeals for an intensification of the campaign against crime have been voiced, and officials have demanded creation of more detachments of the People's Guards.

The Soviet press is rife with reports of the arbitrary and willful acts of the guardsmen. The populace often takes up arms to protect itself against the irresponsible guardsmen, and violence and bloodshed are the result. The courts and the government are shown to be on the side of the guardsmen, even of those who commit illegal acts, including homicide, against the people.

The Soviet leaders attempt to use the Guards to prevent not only hooliganism but also other, more devious crimes against the state such as black marketing and other private enterprises. Thus there is a tendency by the Soviet leaders to use the guardsmen as a political weapon.

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THE SOVIET PEOPLE'S GUARDS, IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE

The formation in March, 1959, of volunteer People's Guards to maintain public order in the USSR has resulted in an increase in legalized violations of the law. The People's Guards, or brigades, were conceived by the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party as a means of combating widespread infringements of the Communist order, such as hooliganism and drunkenness.

Detachments of the Guard operate throughout the country, in all towns and villages, in factories and on building sites, on collective and state farms, in institutions and colleges. They are composed of young people, mainly active members of the Komsomol (Young Communist League), accustomed to regard the mobilization calls of their ruling organs as the immutable law of the state. Their activities are directed by regional and town headquarters headed by local high officials, usually the second secretaries of town and regional committees of the Party (Kommunist, February 11, 1960). The majority of the guardsmen keep a day and night vigil, carefully watching the behavior of Soviet citizens in railway stations, around theaters, cinemas and clubs, in parks and other public places, and in every apartment house. Hundreds of thousands of people are called upon to spend their free time on policework. There is no pay for this extra duty.

The Soviet propagandists claim that thanks to the activities of these detachments there has recently been a sharp decline in crime in the USSR. At first glance this assertion may appear to be true. There are tens of thousands of People's Guards maintaining law and order in the country. In the Ukraine, for instance, there are 23,000 detachments (Pravda Ukrainy, February 17, 1960), in Kazakhstan 4,000, comprising 132,000 persons (Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, March 11, 1960). Corresponding figures for other parts of the Soviet Union are: Moldavia—1,300 and 35,000 (Sovetskaya Moldaviya, January 29, 1960), Armenia—1,200 and 21,000 (Kommunist, February 11, 1960), and Estonia—766 and 12,000 (Sovetskaya Estonia, February 17, 1960).

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One might think that with such an intensification of the campaign for the "observance of socialist legality," public order would have been really consolidated. However, a number of events cast doubt on assertions of lawfulness in the Soviet Union. For instance, the Secretaries of the Communist Parties of various republics—Dinmukhamed A. Kunayev of Kazakhstan, Vasili P. Mzhavanadze of Georgia, Nikolai V. Podgorny of the Ukraine—demanded at recent congresses of their Parties an intensification of the campaign against crime, including an extension of the role of the People's Guards and an increase in their numbers.

The Presidium of the All-Union Central Trade Union Council has also issued an appeal for the creation of still more People's Guards and for an intensification of their activities (Trud (Labor), March 11, 1960).

In the No. 5, 1960, issue of Sotsialisticheskaya Zakonnost (Socialist Law) the Leningrad prosecutor Tsypin was forced to state:

... In factories there is an incomprehensible... tolerance of infringements of the established order, which results in the state suffering serious damage. Not everywhere is the public mobilized in the struggle against contraventions of the law(p. 26).

Officially the People's Guards are called upon to maintain public order, and to combat hooliganism and other crimes and offenses. Originally the leaders of the Party Central Committee tried to create the impression that the formation of these detachments resulted from initiative of the public in an effort to defend itself from hooligan elements. However, the publication of a decree of the Party Central Committee and the Council of Ministers of the USSR "on the participation of workers in the maintenance of public order," and the activities of the People's Guards in general, indicate that establishment of the Guard was the work of the Party leaders themselves (Pravda, March 10, 1960). Typically, the decree itself stressed that the Party effort to educate the public has resulted in a sharp decrease of criminal convictions. Yet instead of subsequently reducing the strength of the police force, the Soviet leaders have reinforced it with a vast army of guardsmen, a development comparable to the creation of a police force in the critical days after October, 1917 (Ogonek /Flame/, No. 2, 1959).

The acts of the Soviet police, however, pale before the outrages committed by the guardsmen. Even the official Soviet press is unable to conceal these arbitrary acts. In Melitopol, the guardsmen

...had a bit to drink and... went back on duty. In the park they again encountered Belenko (a worker member of the Komsomol). Again they detained him, this time for no reason whatsoever, and believing that nobody was around gave him a severe beating (Komsomolskaya Pravda, November 19, 1959).

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The same newspaper also describes how a student, Vladislav Danily, was beaten up "simply because he remonstrated—politely and even timidly—over the arrest of a friend." Guardsmen in Melitopol also beat up a senior schoolboy because "his trousers were less than four matchboxes in width." The People's Guards for the maintenance of public order apparently consist in part of amateur pugilists and would-be vigilantes, who interpret their public duty to the masses thus: "We won't bring them to court... let's get hold of them and beat them up until their own mothers won't recognize them (*Ibid.*)."

Literaturnaya Gazeta recently described the activities of the guardsmen under the eloquent heading "The Strong Right Arm...":

In the evenings the "huguenots" (a new name for fashionably dressed youngsters) came out... in their narrow trousers and fashionable haircuts.... In vain did they with tears in their eyes... protest that they were not "stilyagi" (Teddy Boys) but simply liked going around in narrow trousers and preferred Tony Curtis to Yul Brynner haircuts. The guardsmen would not listen to them. They dragged the heretics to headquarters where their "drainpipes" were ripped along the seams and a narrow strip shaved down the back of their heads.

Naturally these violent and willful acts often force the population to act in self-defense, and this sometimes leads to fights in which fists, knives and firearms are used. In Leningrad a man named V. Kuzmin was sentenced to be shot, three workers were sentenced to ten years' imprisonment and two to five and eight years, respectively, for the murder of the guardsman, V. Trainin. Driver Podkopayev was sentenced to be shot for wounding two guardsmen in Novokashirsk and a worker named Anisimov was similarly sentenced for the murder of another guardsman in Sverdlovsk. In Kharkov, the death sentence was imposed on a worker named Shcheblykin for the murder of V. Shafran, a guardsman. Unknown persons killed the guardsman, A. Atadzhan, in Margelan in Ferganskaya Oblast. Filipovsky, a worker with a large family, was sentenced to be shot for the murder of the guardsman, A. Filonov, in Okhotsk. In Armenia, collective farmer Kalechan was sentenced to be shot and his kinsman Dzhangiryan got fifteen years in jail for resisting the guardsmen and killing one of them, and in Cherkassy the guardsman, V. Voloshenko, was killed.

All these items are taken from the Soviet press, but they represent only a sampling of the cases of violence and bloodshed occurring between workers and the People's Guards. Only examples of "educational value" are published in the Soviet press.

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By inflicting severe penalties on those who resist the guardsmen and threaten their lives, the authorities are evidently on the side of the guardsmen, even of those who commit illegal acts against the people or kill Soviet citizens. An article in Izvestia of March 4, 1960, entitled "The Gudermes Affair," quite openly defends former Guard Commander Bobrov, Secretary of the Komsomol Committee at the Gudermes station depot in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, who was sentenced to six years in prison for murder. During a patrol Bobrov severely beat a worker, V. Ganzhelo, who was not a hooligan but, as the newspaper itself admitted, "a retiring and polite youth." Ganzhelo died from the beating. It was fully proved in court that Bobrov was guilty of premeditated murder, and his sentence was confirmed by the Supreme Court of the Republic; yet despite the patently mild sentence passed, Izvestia accused the investigators, prosecutors and the judges who sentenced Bobrov of having undermined the authority of the People's Guards:

The arrest of Bobrov... has had a detrimental effect on the campaign against hooliganism. Backward elements rejoice over the outcome and are trying to downgrade members of the Guard in every way. The honor of the Guard is sullied; so, too, is the honor of the staff of the locomotive depot. Vindicate Bobrov...

An exceptionally unsavory recipe for the campaign against crime and hooliganism has been given by Radio Moscow. In a broadcast on May 11, it cited as an example worth considering the action of the Police Chief in one area who entrusted the formation of the People's Guard to a "reformed" hooligan, out of jail. Very soon this new "upholder of socialist legality" had gathered a gang of his former hooligan cronies and had re-established public "order" in the region by ruthlessly beating up the gang of hooligans who had taken over when he was jailed.

The Soviet leaders attempt to use the Guard to prevent not only hooliganism but also other forms of crime against the state. At present there are both hidden and open conflicts in the country, and the authorities cannot always be sure of their control over civilian courts. Further, the authority of the state security forces, of the police and of other punitive organs is on the wane. Thus, the duties of the Guard are not restricted to combating hooliganism, as the authorities claim. As the Soviet press itself has said, "it is always possible to control the hooligan, the brawler and the drunk... It is more difficult to root out the parasites, the various speculators, pilferers and those who like making money on the side (Izvestia, February 24, 1960)."

Izvestia significantly states that "a guardsman's work covers everything." This means investigating the way of life of Soviet citizens, intruding into their private lives and using violence on those who do not observe prescribed Communist ideology and morality; in other words, the guards act as a political weapon in the hands of the Party leadership.